

Addressing Food Insecurity in Peterborough

An Urgent Call to Action



Peterborough
Public Health

2023

Contents

What is Household Food Insecurity?.....2

Household Food Insecurity in Peterborough..... 2

Household Food Insecurity in Ontario 3

Realities of Limited Incomes in Peterborough.....4

Is Food Affordable in Peterborough County and City? Not for Some. 4

Case Study #1: Single, Pregnant Person, City 5

Case Study #2: Lone Parent-Led Family, County 6

Case Study #3: Two Parent Family with Children, County..... 7

Case Study #4: Two Parent Family with Children, City 8

Case Study #5: Single Unattached Person, City 9

How Food Insecurity Links to our Community.....10

Well-being of Children and Families:..... 10

Physical Health:..... 11

Mental Health: 11

Indigenous Self-determination and Health Equity: 12

Housing: 13

Climate Change: 13

Food insecurity is a health equity issue..... 14

How Can We Fix the Problem of Household Food Insecurity?.....15

How Can We Learn More and Be Part of the Change?.....16

APPENDIX A: Income Scenarios17

References.....19

We respectfully acknowledge that Peterborough Public Health is located on the Treaty 20 and traditional territory of the Mississauga Anishnaabeg. We offer our gratitude to the First Nations for their care for, and teachings about, our earth and our relations. May we honour those teachings.

What is Household Food Insecurity?

Household food insecurity is a serious health issue, affecting under-served people the most. It is the “inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.”¹ Someone who is food insecure worries about running out of money for food.

Households in our community facing food insecurity may:¹

Worry about running out of food before there is money to buy more.

Not be able to afford balanced or nutritious meals.

Not be able to buy food that meets individual and cultural needs.

Miss meals, eat less food than needed, or even go days without food.



Household Food Insecurity in Peterborough

Roughly 19%* of local households faced food insecurity between 2020-2022 in Peterborough County and City.² This is nearly 1 in 5 local households worrying about having enough money for food. This is the highest number ever recorded in our community.



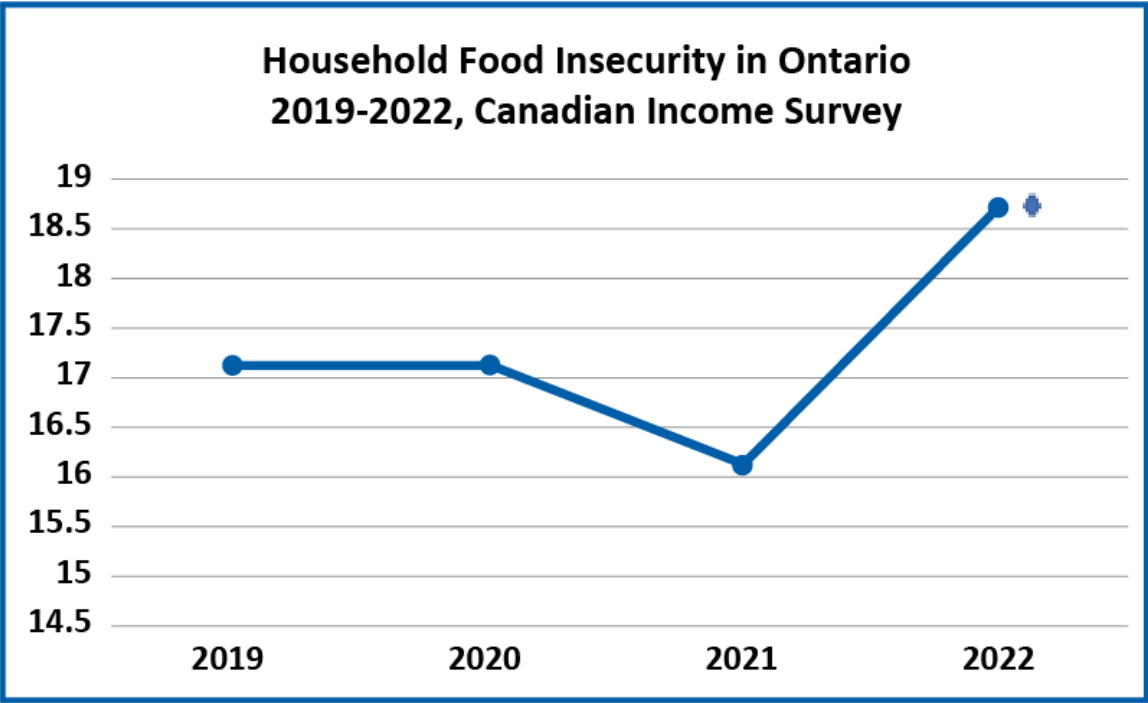
**This number is a 3-year average from the Canadian Income Survey (CIS) that needs to be interpreted with caution due to a small sample size and variability in the sample. Food insecurity numbers may be underestimated as CIS samples do not include unhoused individuals or Indigenous Peoples living on-reserve.*

Nearly 1 in 5 local households faced
Food insecurity between 2020-2022.

This is the highest number ever recorded in Peterborough.



Household Food Insecurity in Ontario



Source: Public Health Ontario²

◆ Statistically significant increase from previous year

Rising Food Insecurity: Behind the Numbers^{1, 3, 4}

Household food insecurity was a problem before the COVID-19 pandemic, but it has gotten worse. In Ontario, there was a significant increase in household food insecurity between 2021 and 2022.

During this time period:

- Canada experienced the fastest increase in the cost of food since the early 1980s: roughly 11%. The cost of food has increased an additional 6% from September 2022 to September 2023.
- Some income supports that may have buffered food insecurity in 2020-2021 (e.g., CERB), ended.
- Incomes have not increased enough to match inflation or the increasing costs of food, housing, and other basic needs.

Realities of Limited Incomes in Peterborough

Is Food Affordable in Peterborough County and City? Not for Some.

Minimum wage earners and households living on fixed incomes have little, if any, money left to cover basic monthly expenses after paying for shelter and food. The following case studies do not represent real people but are based on research and current data representing the impacts of household food insecurity. They include real costs for individuals and families living in Peterborough County and City, and real income examples as of May 2023. **Necessary monthly expenses not captured in these case studies include: phone/internet, utilities, transportation, household/personal care items, clothing, laundry, childcare, children's activities and school supplies, etc.** Income amounts listed are after tax, and include tax credits, and benefits. Actual income amounts in our community may be lower if residents are not able to file income tax and/or do not apply for all available tax credits.


People in our community are struggling to make ends meet.



Case Study #1: Single, Pregnant Person, City

- Aisha is in their late 20s, lives on their own in the City of Peterborough, and is expecting a baby.
- They are unable to work due to a chronic health condition and rely on the **Ontario Disability Support Program** for income.
- The cost of rent for their one-bedroom apartment takes up almost 80% of their monthly income.

Aisha tries to eat balanced meals to give their baby a good start. However, due to a limited income, this is not always possible, and leads to a monthly deficit, even before paying for everything else needed to get by. Facing compounding stress and anxiety about being able to afford rent, food, and necessities for themselves and the baby, Aisha experiences mental health decline. Aisha is even more behind in 2023 than 2022, before other expenses such as transportation, internet, utilities, and supplies to prepare for the new baby.




2022	2023
Income, \$1349	Income, \$1409
– Rent, \$1049 (78% of income)	– Rent, \$1090 (77% of income)
– Food, \$363 (27% of income)	– Food, \$415 (29% of income)
= – \$63 (deficit)	= – \$96 (deficit)

Case Study #2: Lone Parent-Led Family, County

- Sheena is a single parent with two children under 6 years old.
- She rents a 2-bedroom basement apartment in Peterborough County.
- Sheena currently receives **Ontario Works**, as she has not been able to find work that also allows her to care for her young children.

Sheena is very resourceful with her limited budget, but rising costs of living means she is having trouble making ends meet. After paying for rent and food alone, she has \$663 left for everything else, which is \$80 less than in 2022. She just found out that she needs to replace her used car, her only form of transportation. But she doesn't know how she will pay for this unexpected expense. She finds herself eating less and sometimes skipping meals to make sure that her kids have enough to eat. She notices that she is not feeling her best.

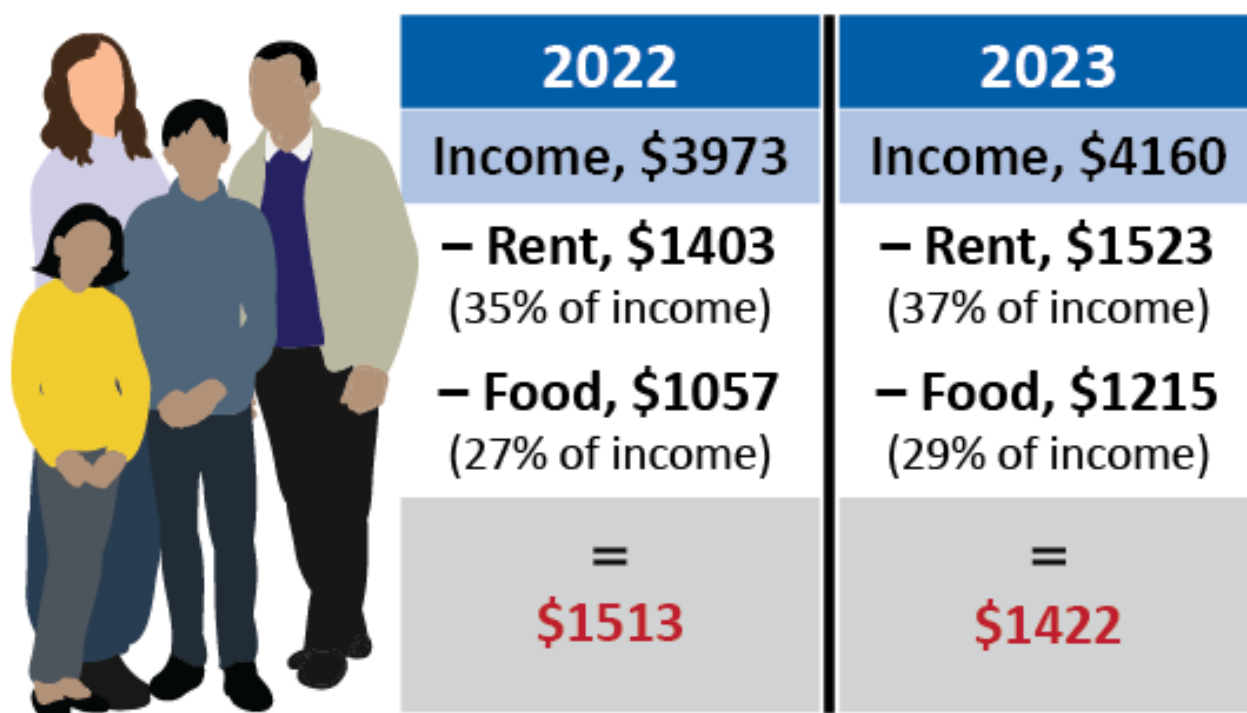


	2022	2023
	Income, \$2705	Income, \$2743
	– Rent, \$1316 (49% of income)	– Rent, \$1339 (49% of income)
	– Food, \$646 (24% of income)	– Food, \$741 (27% of income)
	= \$743	= \$663

Case Study #3: Two Parent Family with Children, County

- Drew and Taylor have 2 children, ages 8 and 14.
- They rent a 3-bedroom apartment in Peterborough County.
- Drew **works full time at minimum wage**. Taylor hopes to re-train and go back to college but is currently a full-time care-giver for their parents, and children.

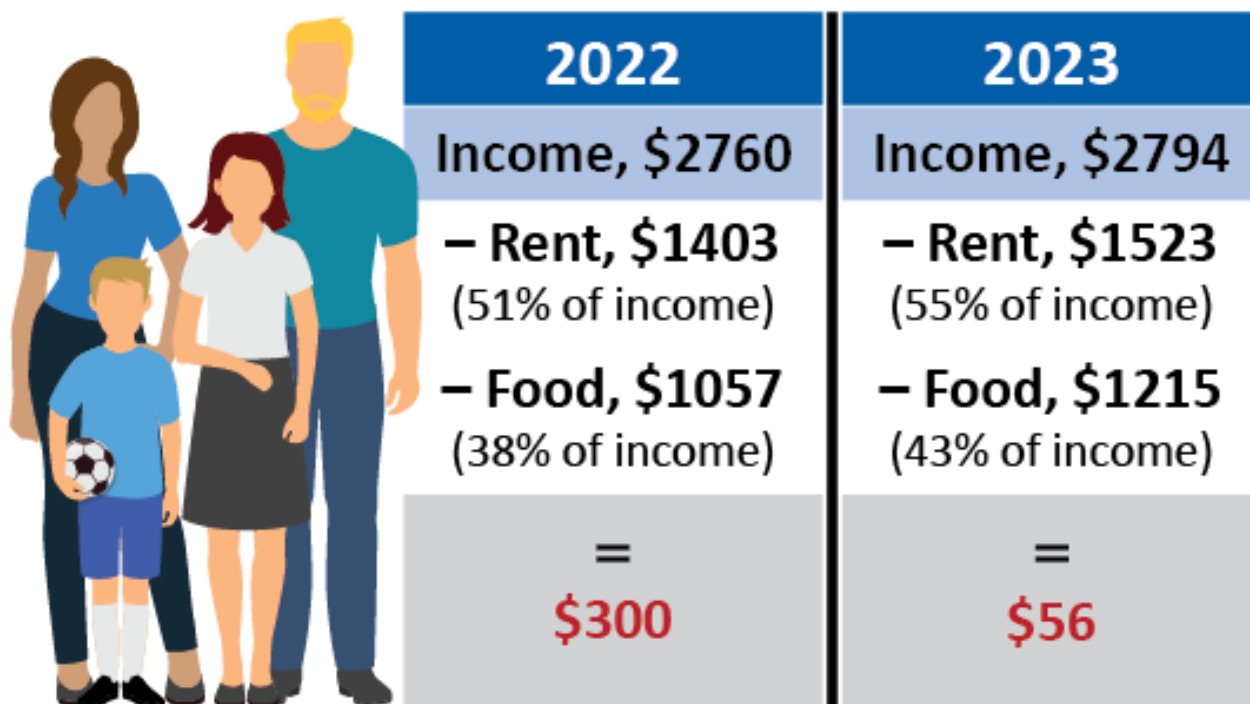
Their kids have asked if they can go on a family vacation like some of their friends, but Drew and Taylor find that can barely afford necessities after paying for monthly bills, and other essentials.



Case Study #4: Two Parent Family with Children, City

- Jesse and Morgan have 2 children, ages 8 and 14.
- They rent a 3-bedroom apartment in the City of Peterborough.
- Jesse and Morgan used to own a small business, which they lost during the COVID-19 pandemic. They currently receive income from **Ontario Works** as they haven't been able to find suitable work at this time.


Jesse and Morgan live with their children in a crowded apartment complex with minimal green space. Unfortunately, the apartment complex also has an older air exchange system and no air conditioning in the warmer months. But moving to safe, healthy housing feels out of reach, as they are unable to find affordable housing options that meet their needs. They are already facing challenges to make ends meet. As of 2023, food and housing alone take up **98% of their income**, and they have almost nothing left for all other basic needs.



Case Study #5: Single Unattached Person, City

- Sam is 40 years old and is currently unemployed due to circumstances outside of his control.
- He receives income from **Ontario Works**.
- After accounting for all benefits received, Sam's entire income is not enough to meet monthly rent for a simple bachelor apartment in the City of Peterborough in 2023.

Sam worries daily about losing his housing and is unable to pay for food. Despite visiting food banks and meal programs, he is severely food insecure, and sometimes goes days without eating a real meal.



	2022	2023
	Income, \$863	Income, \$865
	– Rent, \$805 (93% of income)	– Rent, \$873 (101% of income)
	– Food, \$381 (44% of income)	– Food, \$436 (50% of income)
	=	=
	– \$323 (deficit)	– \$444 (deficit)

For more information, data sources, and cost breakdowns for each case study or for further income scenarios, see Appendix A.

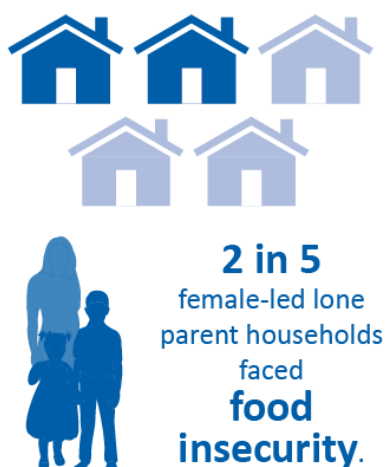
How Food Insecurity Links to our Community

Household food insecurity is a complex income problem that affects our community. When incomes do not match the cost of food and other basic needs, there are serious consequences.

Well-being of Children and Families:

- Household food insecurity can have negative, long-lasting impacts on child health and well-being.⁵ It is linked with adverse childhood experiences,⁶ and may be a source of toxic stress,⁷ which can affect brain development in children. Toxic stress can have long term consequences for learning, behavior, and both physical and mental health.⁸ This can perpetuate cycles of health inequity.
- Sadly, many families are affected by food insecurity. In Canada in 2022,¹
 - 1 in 5 couples with children were food insecure,
 - 2 in 5 female-led lone parent households faced food insecurity - the highest rate by household type, and,
 - 1 in 4 children faced food insecurity.

In 2022...



Policies, resources, and strategic community action can support under-served single parents and families as they help create healthy, safe, and nurturing environments for child development.

Physical Health:

- Children and adults experiencing food insecurity have increased risk for poor health outcomes.⁵ For example:
 - Food insecurity makes it difficult to eat balanced meals that meet nutrition needs.
 - Adults living in food insecure households have a higher risk of infectious diseases. They are also more likely to face poor oral health and injuries.
 - Adults living in food insecure households also have a higher risk of chronic conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, back problems, and chronic pain.⁵
 - Facing food insecurity makes it very difficult to manage chronic health conditions.
 - Premature death is a serious consequence of food insecurity.⁵ Tragically, people's lives are shortened by an average of 9 years, because they face severe food insecurity.⁵



Food insecurity takes a major toll on the health care system.⁵ Addressing food insecurity before it happens could result in significant savings for public health care dollars and can also help us to build a stronger and more equitable health system.

Mental Health:

- Food insecurity and poor mental health are strongly linked.⁵ For example:
 - Adults in food insecure households have a higher risk of mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety disorders.⁵
 - Food insecurity is a strong predictor of usage of public mental health care services and supports. In one study, adults experiencing severe food insecurity were more than twice as likely to use health care services for mental health reasons over the past year, than those who were food secure.⁹
 - Experiencing household food insecurity during pregnancy increases the likelihood of being treated for postpartum mental health problems, and infants have a higher likelihood of visiting an emergency department.¹⁰
 - Children facing household food insecurity are more likely to experience poor mental health than those in food secure households.⁵
 - Adequate nutrition is essential for child health, learning, development and well-being.
 - Severe food insecurity and experiences of child and youth hunger are linked to depression and suicidal ideation in adolescence and early adulthood.⁵
 - Food insecurity is connected to hyperactivity and inattention in the early years.⁵



Addressing barriers to services and health inequities requires addressing mental health, well-being and household food insecurity.

Indigenous Self-determination and Health Equity:

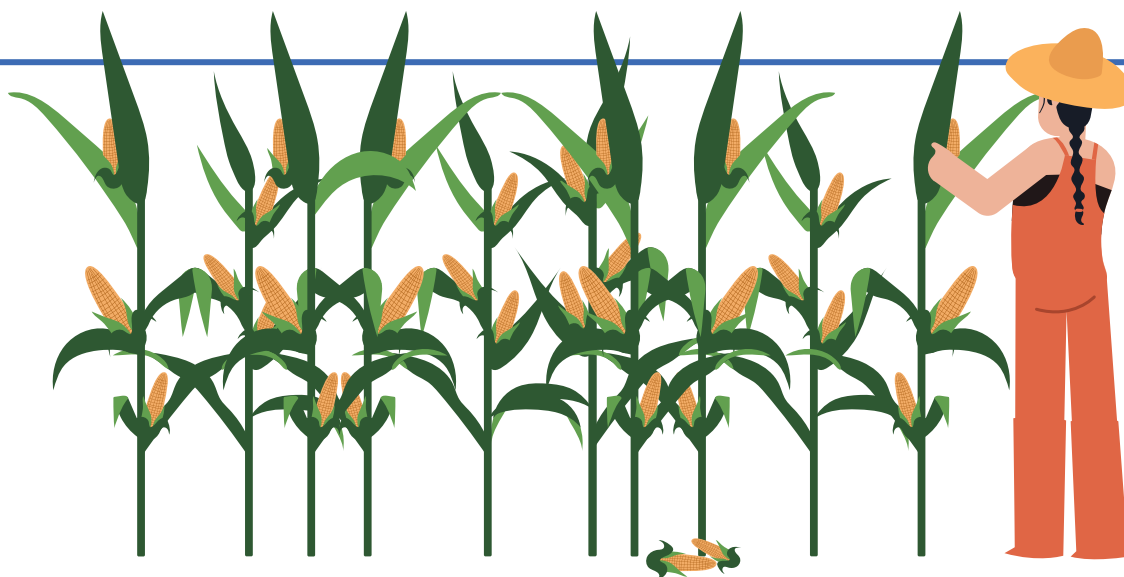
- Food insecurity disproportionately impacts visible minorities.¹ It is important to listen to voices of these groups and allow them to lead and shape how we understand data and experiences.
- Restricted access to traditional lands, water, and food resources impacts Indigenous Peoples' access to traditional foods, which are healthy, nutrient dense, and culturally preferred.¹¹
- Although data indicate that Indigenous Peoples face higher rates of food insecurity than the general population, Indigenous Peoples have strengths, resilience, and wisdom to help us move towards health equity together.
- Indigenous health inequities are complex and deeply rooted in historical and ongoing acts of colonization.



To move forward together, we can work towards allyship, and support Indigenous Food Sovereignty. We must work alongside Indigenous Peoples to listen, reflect, amplify Indigenous voices, and help make positive community led changes.

What is Food Sovereignty?

“Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.”- *La Via Campesina*



Housing:

- Housing and food insecurity are deeply interconnected.
 - Renters are more likely to be food insecure than home-owners.¹
 - Owners with mortgages are more vulnerable to food insecurity than those who are mortgage free.¹
- Unaffordable housing is linked to negative health impacts, food insecurity and inadequate nutrition.¹² Rising housing costs force people with limited incomes to choose between paying rent and other basics like food. In addition, unhoused people are highly vulnerable to food insecurity.¹
- Housing and food are basic needs. We need both to be healthy, and to thrive. But concerning, the lowest income households in our community have very limited access to rental stock.¹³ Alarming, the housing crisis in Peterborough has become worse in 2023 than it was in 2022.¹³

In 2022,
27.5%
of Canadian
households who
rented, faced
food insecurity.¹



Our community, local municipalities, provincial and federal governments and First Nations need to work together to address health inequities related to housing and shelter.

Climate Change:

- Climate change may cause decreased food production in Ontario and around the world.^{14,15} This may result from droughts, increased risk of food spoilage and contamination, more pests, impacts of high temperatures on livestock health, and damage to crops from extreme weather events.
- Climate change can contribute to higher food prices.³ Higher food prices have the greatest impact on those already facing food insecurity.



- When people don't have enough money for food, every day can feel like an emergency. Adaptation measures such as preparing emergency kits for extreme weather events and power outages, are not realistic for many community members. Adequate incomes and access to basic needs are necessary for people to be able to adapt to health impacts of climate change.

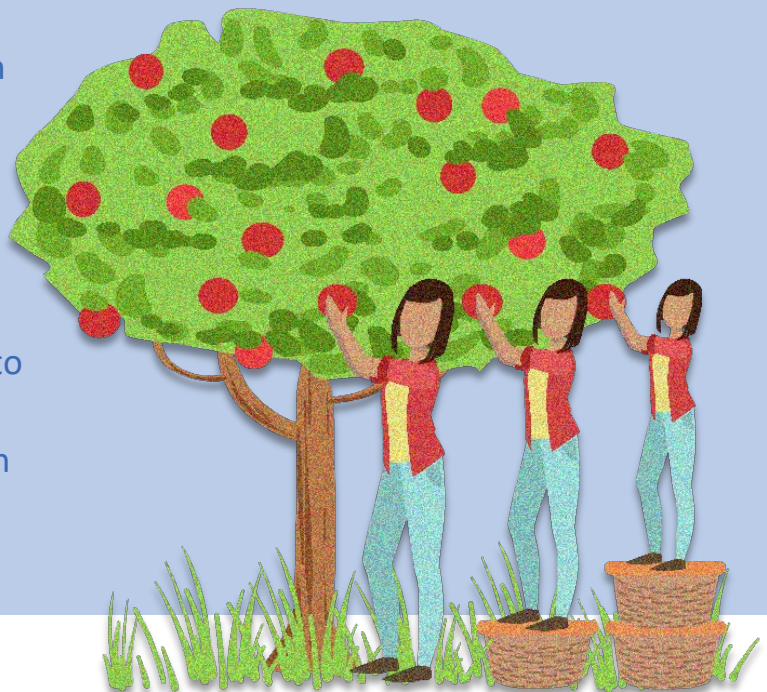
Supporting those who are most vulnerable to the health impacts of climate change and strengthening our food systems can help our community adapt and reduce negative health impacts.

Food insecurity is a health equity issue.

This means that some groups are more affected than others and can be held back from reaching their health potential because of factors that are beyond their control. For our community to be healthy and resilient, we need to make sure that no one is left behind, that everyone is included, and all have their basic needs met (e.g., food, water, housing, transportation, education, healthcare, etc.).

What is Health Equity?

Health equity means that all people can reach their full health potential and are not disadvantaged from attaining it because of their race, gender, age, socioeconomic status or other socially determined circumstances. Different people need different heights of steps to reach the apple tree, just as different people need different supports to reach health equity.



How Can We Fix the Problem of Household Food Insecurity?

Household food insecurity is an income problem that requires income solutions.¹⁶

Research supports that policies that improve incomes to meet basic needs can help move the needle on household food insecurity. For example, between 2007-2013, low income seniors receiving public pensions (a form of guaranteed income) had **half the rate of food insecurity**, compared with low income Canadians under the age of 65, who did not have this income floor.¹⁷ Income solutions address the root of the problem, help to preserve dignity, give choices to buy foods that meet needs, and promote the right to food.



Examples of income solutions:

- Living Wages,
- A basic income guarantee or guaranteed liveable income,
- Lowering income tax rates for lowest-income households,
- Social assistance, benefit rates, minimum wage rates, and targeted benefits that match the cost of living. Targeted benefits may include (but are not limited to):
 - Disability benefits, and
 - Child benefits designed to adequately support lowest income families.

What about Food Banks?

Although food banks and meal programs may support some people with immediate needs, **they have not been shown to reduce household food insecurity.**¹⁷

We can take action to support systemic change. We can speak up for income solutions, the right to affordable housing, childcare, dental and drug plans.

Working together strategically to change our systems can support underserved groups, including single-parent families, people impacted by the drug poisoning crisis, and those vulnerable to health impacts of climate change. There are benefits for our whole community **WHEN NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND.**

How Can We Learn More and Be Part of the Change?

Get Connected and Explore Issues and Solutions.

- **Food Insecurity** - www.odph.ca/centsless, or www.proof.utoronto.ca
- **Food Action and the Peterborough Food Charter** - www.foodinpeterborough.ca
- **Housing**
 - Housing and Homelessness Plan - www.peterborough.ca/housing
 - United Way, Housing is Fundamental 2023 https://www.uwpeterborough.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/HiF_2023_digital.pdf
- **Basic Income**
 - Basic Income and Food Insecurity - www.obin.ca/bi_and_food_security
 - Basic Income Peterborough - www.nourishproject.ca/basic-income-peterborough-network
- **Living Wage** - United Way Peterborough and www.ontariolivingwage.ca/



Learn about additional systemic roots of food insecurity.

Racism and colonialism connect deeply with food insecurity, food access, and food sovereignty.

Here is one place to learn more about food sovereignty on turtle island:

<https://foodsecurecanada.org/2023/10/04/harvesting-hope-and-change-food-sovereignty-on-turtle-island/>

Speak up for change. Your voice can make a difference.

- Talk about food insecurity, incomes, and solutions with your family, friends and community.
- Write to or chat with your local MP, MPP or Council members about the need to improve incomes and housing to help address food insecurity and health inequities. You can find templates here: www.odph.ca/centsless



Let's take action to ensure that everyone can thrive with health and dignity.

APPENDIX A: Income Scenarios

Eleven Scenarios Based on Income and Benefits in Ontario and Canada, and Peterborough Food and Housing Costs (May 2023)

- Case studies above and the scenarios below use food cost data from the Peterborough County and City collected by Peterborough Public Health staff in May 2023. This data was collected as part of pilot testing of an updated process to monitor food affordability in Ontario.
 - The 61 food items costed are based on the 2019 National Nutritious Food Basket (NFB)¹⁸ and reflect Canada's Food Guide.¹⁹ To reduce missingness of certain food items, proxy items were used, which may have minor differences in nutrition and cost, compared to preferred items specified by the costing process. Food cost data does not include: non-food items, foods that may be needed to meet cultural or religious needs, or foods to manage disease conditions, allergies, or intolerances.
 - Canada's food guide and the NFB are not inclusive for all religious and cultural groups, and they do not acknowledge traditional Indigenous foods and food procurement practices. Peterborough Public Health recognizes this as a significant limitation of this data collection.
- There were minor updates to the food costing process between 2022 and 2023. Food cost data from these years should not be compared to years prior to 2022, due to significant changes in food costing methodology, and use of a different food list.
- The below income scenarios integrate provincial and federal benefits from May 2023, including child benefits, GST/HST credits, the Ontario Trillium Benefit, the Canada Worker Benefit, and the Climate Action Incentive Payment. They assume that individuals and families have been able to file taxes. Calculations are based on benefits received within a Census Metropolitan Area. Scenarios highlight 2022 Peterborough Census Metropolitan Area Housing Cost Data from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Table 1: Income Scenarios 1-4

Monthly Calculations	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4
	Family of Four, Ontario Works	Family of Four, Full-Time Minimum Wage Earner	Family of Four, Median Income (after tax)	Single Parent Household with 2 Children, Ontario Works (ages 8. 14)
Total Income including benefits	\$2,794.00	\$4,160.00	\$9,284.00	\$2,560.00
Selected Expenses				
	(3 Bdr.)	(3 Bdr.)	(3 Bdr.)	(2 Bdr.)
Average Monthly Rent (may or may not include heat/hydro)	\$1,523.00	\$1,523.00	\$1,523.00	\$1,339.00
Food	\$1,215.00	\$1,215.00	\$1,215.00	\$894.00
Total Selected Expenses	\$2,738.00	\$2,738.00	\$2,738.00	\$2,233.00
Funds Remaining (for other basic needs e.g. telephone, transportation, child care, household and personal care items, clothing, school supplies etc.)	\$56.00	\$1,422.00	\$6,546.00	\$327.00
Percentage of income required for rent	55%	37%	16%	52%
Percentage of income required to purchase healthy food	43%	29%	13%	35%
Total percentage of income required for rent and food alone (Selected Expenses/Income x100%)	98%	66%	29%	87%

Table 2: Income Scenarios 5-8

Monthly Calculations	Scenario 5	Scenario 6	Scenario 7	Scenario 8
	One Person Household, Ontario Works	One Person Household, Ontario Disability Support Program	One Person Household, Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Supplement	Married Couple, Ontario Disability Support Program
Total Income including benefits	\$865.00	\$1,369.00	\$1,993.00	\$2,433.00
Selected Expenses				
Average Monthly Rent (may or may not include heat/hydro)	(Bachelor)	(1 Bdr.) ^p	(1 Bdr.)	(1 Bdr.)
	\$873.00	\$1,090.00	\$1,090.00	\$1,090.00
Food	\$436.00	\$436.00	\$314.00	\$727.00
Total Selected Expenses	\$1,309.00	\$1,526.00	\$1,404.00	\$1,817.00
Funds Remaining (for other basic needs e.g. telephone, transportation, child care, household and personal care items, clothing, school supplies etc.)	\$(444.00)	\$(157.00)	\$589.00	\$616.00
Percentage of income required for rent	101%	80%	55%	45%
Percentage of income required to purchase healthy food	50%	32%	16%	30%
Total percentage of income required for rent and food alone (Selected Expenses/Income x100%)	151%	111%	70%	75%

Table 3: Income Scenarios 9-11

Monthly Calculations	Scenario 9	Scenario 10	Scenario 11
	Single Pregnant Person, Ontario Disability Support Program	Single Parent Household with 2 Children (under 6y), Full-Time Minimum Wage Earner	Single Parent Household with 2 Children (under 6y), Ontario Works
Total Income including benefits	\$1,409.00	\$4,302.00	\$2,743.00
Selected Expenses			
Average Monthly Rent (may or may not include heat/hydro)	(1 Bdr.)	(2 Bdr.)	(2 Bdr.)
	\$1,090.00	\$1,339.00	\$1,339.00
Food	\$415.00	\$741.00	\$741.00
Total Selected Expenses	\$1,505.00	\$2,080.00	\$2,080.00
Funds Remaining (for other basic needs e.g. telephone, transportation, child care, household and personal care items, clothing, school supplies etc.)	\$(96.00)	\$2,222.00	\$663.00
Percentage of income required for rent	77%	31%	49%
Percentage of income required to purchase healthy food	29%	17%	27%
Total percentage of income required for rent and food alone (Selected Expenses/Income x100%)	107%	48%	76%

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